

A Small Group Discussion Guide

for the

Report from the Classis Grand Rapids East

Study Committee on

**“The Biblical and Theological Support Currently
Offered by Christian Proponents of
Same-Sex Marriage”**

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Introduction—Guidance for Discussion Group Leaders

Study Group Purpose: In developing this study guide for congregational use, members of the committee held in mind the model developed by The Colossian Forum¹ of using difficult—even divisive—issues as opportunities for spiritual growth, worship, and building spiritual maturity. We pray that study group participants will come to understand and appreciate the sincere faith of the individuals who hold the positions presented in the report, even if they do not agree with them. Similarly we pray that when participants in the study group discover that they do not all hold the same position on the issues presented, that they will nonetheless recognize in each other the work of God’s Spirit and their sisterhood and brotherhood in Christ.

Group Formation: We recommend that study groups be composed of no more than 10 to 12 people in order to facilitate everyone’s participation. A range of ages and perspectives is encouraged, but not required. Keep in mind that the information on gender and sexuality presented in the report may make some church members uncomfortable and may not be appropriate for young teens.

Participant Commitment: It is extremely important to the overall success of the discussion group, that members make a sincere commitment to participate in every session and to do the requisite reading for each session. This ranges from 10 to 25 pages. Without group members reading the sections of the report to be discussed in each session, full participation and an accurate understanding of the report will be difficult, if not impossible.

Course Outline: The original report contains a lengthy summary and 11 sections, thus a series of 12 group meetings might seem a logical plan for a full semester’s work. If your participants can commit to that, wonderful! But, realistically, the committee believes that a series of six discussion sessions is more manageable and would enable more members of a congregation to participate. For that reason, we recommend the following:

- Week One: Summary and Section 1
- Week Two: Sections 2 and 3
- Week Three: Sections 4 and 5
- Week Four: Sections 6 and 7
- Week Five: Sections 8 and 9
- Week Six: Sections 10 and 11

You are, of course, free to modify this and to allocate a full meeting to the discussion of any topic of particular interest to your participants or the life of your congregation. Sessions should be at least 60 minutes long, and preferably 90 minutes. For that reason, we also suggest that these meetings not occur as part of a Sunday morning adult education program. That simply will not allow adequate time for discussion and reflection.

Discussion Questions: This study guide provides a set of questions to facilitate discussion on each section of the report. In many cases, there are more questions than you will have time to discuss. That is

intentional. We want to provide you with food for thought beyond each 60 to 90 minute session. Moreover, group leaders and participants are free to ask their own questions and to personalize the discussion to the needs of group members and the congregation. If your congregation is actively wrestling with some area addressed by the report, your group may benefit from an extended and deeper discussion of that area, and may want to minimize discussion on one of the other areas of the report.

Session Format: Whether you choose to meet weekly for a period of six or more weeks, or you choose to meet every other week over the course of several months, we recommend a format along the following lines. Again we take our model from the work of The Colossian Forum.

1. Begin with a brief welcome and an overview of the session's topic(s) in just a couple of sentences. Remind participants that the objective is to learn and grow in faith and unity, not to change minds.
2. Share a psalm or short devotional that is applicable to the makeup of the group. Focus on unifying words of worship and praise.
3. Ask a member of the group to lead in prayer and ask for the presence of the Spirit throughout the discussion.
4. Lead into the discussion with open-ended questions. We suggest you start with one or two of the questions provided in the study guide, but don't be rigid about working through every question. Assume that you will not have time to talk about each question, and assume that prepared participants will have their own questions to ask.
5. Watch your time. If you are covering two sections of the report in one session be sure you move onto the second section somewhere near the half-way point in your allotted time. As the discussion moves to the second half of the meeting's agenda, again, lead with one or two provided questions before branching out to questions raised by participants.
6. Be careful to stay on topic. It is very easy for discussions like these to wander far afield. When that happens—and it will—be prepared to gently bring the focus back to the topic at hand. It is most beneficial if this responsibility does not always fall to the discussion leader. Any group member who senses the discussion has gone off track should feel empowered to remind the group of their focus—but this should always be done tactfully and without criticism.
7. Try to reserve the last 6 to 10 minutes for group members to summarize what went well during the discussion, where it was helpful and a blessing, what new insight they may have gained, what they came to appreciate about another member of the group. If a discussion did not go well, was heated, or just fell flat, allow room for lament and, if necessary, an apology.
8. Finally conclude with a brief prayer that summarizes the joys and laments that were voiced, then remind participants of the date, time, and assignment for the next meeting.

Afterwards: If, at the conclusion of your agreed upon series of meetings, you find that the discussions have been fruitful and have resulted in growth in unity and love for God and each other, you may want to reconvene the group once or twice for a period of reflection and reinforcement of the growth that occurred. On the other hand, if the difficult nature of the discussions challenged your sense of unity and

raised conflicts, you might want to reconvene the group to process what was going on and why things went as they did.

¹The Colossian Forum is an organization that seeks “to help Christians of all ages engage difficult questions in ways that build up love of God and neighbor. Churches or Christian schools engage in a[n] ...experience where cross-generational, diverse, and often deeply divided participants engage conflict within a thoughtful and richly theological process that includes prayer, worship, and lament.”

www.ColossianForum.org

Discussion Questions for Section 1
Guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Reinterpretation of Scripture

1. Some church teaching has changed over time based on Spirit-prompted reinterpretations of Scripture. Many of these reinterpretations affirm an underlying moral principal (e.g., exploiting the poor is wrong) while recognizing changing cultural realities (e.g., saving or lending money at modest interest rates). What other changes in interpretation do you recall that follow this pattern? _____

2. Some Christians argue today for a Spirit-prompted reinterpretation of Scripture that allows for same-sex marriage while continuing to consider exploitative or libertine sex as breaking moral principal. How might such a reinterpretation be, or not be, in the pattern of previous Spirit-prompted reinterpretations?

3. This section states that “advances in science in the last few decades lead us to reconsider whether various forms of same-sex attraction and intersex conditions should be seen as ‘creational variants’ (see pg. 18).” How would you describe this tension between scientific evidence and theological beliefs about the Fall?

4. If a church were to allow same-sex married couples as members and leaders, some church members would perceive this as the church condoning sinful behavior. But if that church refused membership or leadership to same-sex married couples, other members would perceive this refusal as the church sinning by excluding and hurting these couples. How should a church handle a situation like this where, no matter what it does, some members will believe the church is sinning? _____

5. This section demonstrates that the church has repeatedly been moved by cultural changes (see pg. 15). How might the church become more open to current cries of injustice in the culture of which it is a part?

6. If a same-sex married couple attended your church, and one or both clearly had been given gifts of leadership suitable for serving on church council, and if they testified that their mutually-supportive marriage relationship helped them to use their gifts of service, how might you respond? What would constitute for your evidence from the Holy Spirit of their calling to serve? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 2

Advances in Scientific Understandings of Sex and Gender, Intersex and Transgender

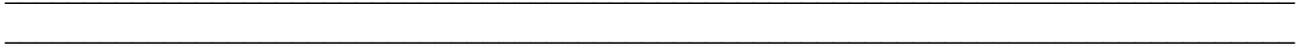
1. Many people believe the prominence of LGBT issues are a sign of our times, and they are surprised at the ample cultural and historical evidence of persons who cannot be classified simply as “male” or “female.” Why do you think these gender variant individuals “disappeared” in Western culture? What brings them to our attention now (see pg. 28-30)? _____

2. Section 2 reports that transgender persons experience more skepticism about their condition than intersex persons, since gender dysphoria lacks biological indicators. Do you consider gender dysphoria to be equally valid with being intersex? What is the most helpful and healing way to respond to someone who tells you they are transgender? _____

3. Science suggests that gender variance arises from interwoven biological, psychological, cultural, and social factors. How might this complexity influence your perspective on LGBT issues?

4. The scientific consensus is that gender exists along a spectrum: most people self-identify toward one or the other ends of that spectrum; however, many others fall somewhere in between. How does this gender variance complicate a view of marriage where it is defined as a union between a man and a woman? _____

5. We now know that male and female sexuality exists on a spectrum. How then should we understand the statement in Genesis 1: “Male and female He created them” (NIV)? _____



Discussion Questions for Section 3

Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Variance: Disorder versus Creational Variance

1. Do you believe gender variance is a disorder resulting from the fall or a creational variance? Does the Bible address gender variance directly or indirectly? Consider the connections to theological views of “disability.” Should gender variance restrict one’s roles or rights in society or the church? Do these findings impact how you think about same-sex marriage? Why, or why not?

2. This section notes that the church has historically considered left-handedness and dark skin as disorders or defects. How do we know that they are not? How can we determine whether to consider physical disabilities as disorder or diversity? What insights can this give us for considering questions about sexual orientation, intersex, and gender identification?

3. The rates of mental health problems, suicide, homelessness, substance abuse, and sexual assault are significantly higher for LGBT individuals in our culture, especially among youth (particularly those raised in religious households) and persons of color. What are the church’s responsibilities in responding to this serious problem?

4. Can a church hold to traditional beliefs about disordered sexuality and still be a hospitable community for LGBT and intersex persons?

5. If the church were to embrace same-sex marriage as a “concession to brokenness,” according to the third view described in Section 3, what problems would this solve? What new problems would this create? Why would some same-sex couples reject and resent this view?

Discussion Question for Section 4

Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture According to a Reformed Hermeneutic

1. Interpretation guidelines 3, 7 and 8 deal with the relationship between the whole of Scripture (or its central purpose) and individual parts of Scripture. How do you feel this issue of interpreting parts of Scripture within its whole purpose relates to this study? _____

2. Guidelines 3, 7, and 8 (Scripture has a redemptive overall purpose, Scripture interprets Scripture, and Interpret obscure passages in light of clearer passages) could be used to point to the most prominent traits of God being a God of Love (e.g., I Jn. 4:8, etc.) and Justice (e.g., Lk. 18:7-8, etc.). Some would argue that an interpretation of Scripture that prohibits gay and lesbian Christians from entering a covenantal marriage bond is neither loving nor just. What are your thoughts about this argument? _____

3. Guideline 5 (Interpret a Scripture passage considering the specific cultural and historical context; see pg. 44) has been heavily relied upon by affirming Christians to interpret Paul's letters to the Romans (Rom. 1:18-32), Corinthians (I Cor. 6:9), and to Timothy (I Tim. 1:9-10). They believe that Paul was condemning idolatrous pedophilia, male prostitution, exploitative sex, and the worship of sexual pleasure that was rampant in his day in the temples of the Roman Empire (Paul's cultural and historical context). Therefore, affirming Christians hold these passages do not condemn same-sex marriage of couples who love and serve the Lord. What do you think of this application of Guideline 5? _____

4. This section states that Scripture is "God's inspired and authoritative revelation" (see pg. 43) and also that "Scripture was originally addressed to people in specific cultural and historical contexts" (see pg. 44). How can this create tension as we interpret Scripture? How does this tension explain some of the historical cases covered in Section 1 (see pg. 12-15)? How does it help to explain disagreement about same-sex marriage? _____

5. Guideline 4 speaks to the progressive revelation of God's redemptive plan with further revelation and greater clarity. Can you identify instances in Scripture where early church leaders also reinterpreted or changed their application of the law based on where they saw the Spirit leading the church? How might this historical pattern of reinterpretation of Scripture influence the church's debate about same-sex marriage? _____

6. Guideline 1 speaks of the two forms of God's revelation, general and special. How have you experienced the church balancing these two forms of revelation? Does the church succeed in holding both in a healthy tension? How or how not? Identify some specific examples to support your answer. As the church encounters apparent tension between general (science) and special (Scripture) revelation on the issue of understanding and accepting same-sex married Christians, how can it work to resolve the tension in a spiritually and psychologically healthy fashion? _____

7. Do Christians who see same-sex marriage as fitting within biblical guidelines follow historic guidelines for biblical interpretation? How or how not? If yes, what does that mean for how we worship, lead, and minister in our churches? If not clearly so, how much room is there for worshipping together? Remaining in the same congregation/denomination? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 5

Interpretation of Biblical Passages Referring to Gender Differentiation and Same-sex Intercourse

1. Given the four points of scholarly agreement about the historical context (see pg. 47), why do scholars still disagree on the meaning of these seven Biblical passages? How do you weigh these four factors in your own reading of these passages? How can we weigh them together, especially with those with whom we disagree? _____

2. Why do those who affirm same-sex marriage believe that the inability to procreate, which seems mandated in Genesis 1, should not disqualify same-sex couples from marriage (see pg. 50-52)? How do they believe that same-sex couples can live out the vision of marriage given in Genesis 1 and 2?

3. Think of an example of a law from Leviticus that we no longer follow, and an example of one we still do (see pg. 65-68 for suggestions). What is the difference between the two? How have Christians determined whether a Levitical law is still relevant today? Can that help us as we read Levitical prohibitions against same-sex physical relations (see pg. 53-54)? _____

4. Affirming scholars say 1 Timothy 1:10 most likely refers to abusive same-sex behavior. If so, how does that help explain the inclusion of same-sex physical relations on the list of sins in this passage (see pg. 54-55)? Why do those who are affirming think that committed love between covenantal, same-sex partners is not what is referred to in this list? _____

5. What is your view of the exchange of sexual desires described in Romans 1, and how does it relate to same-sex, Christian couples today (see pg. 55-56)? _____

6. Do you agree that there is "reasonable dispute" among scholars about the meaning of these passages (see pg. 56-57)? What would "reasonable dispute" look like in your church, or in our denomination?

7. What effect do the experiences of LGBT members in the church and the witness of same-sex couples to the fruit of the Spirit in their marriages have on our reading of these passages (see pg. 58)? What effect should they have? Is it legitimate for life experiences to raise new questions about biblical teaching? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 6
**Quotations of Contemporary Authors on Biblical Passages Related to Gender
Differentiation and Same-Sex Intercourse**

1. What comments can you make regarding a variety of the quotes found in this section, not only your opinions but also questions of clarification? _____

2. If you have time in your group, or want to reflect further on your own after you discuss Sections 4 & 5, spend some time reading the quotations in Section 6 (see pg. 60-84). For each passage discussed, underline one phrase or sentence that makes a notable point and with which you agree. Then underline one phrase or sentence with which you disagree, or wonder about, but which you nonetheless think makes a constructive, worthwhile point that advances the discussion. Compare your results with other group members. _____

Introduction: Below are four partial quotations lifted from Section 6. The first two are from men that hold to a strong traditional position regarding same-sex marriage. The second two are from men that hold to an affirming, inclusive position. All four are giving their thoughts about Genesis 1 & 2 (see pg. 60-63).

Gagnon: Only a being made from ‘*adam*’ can and ought to become someone with whom ‘*adam*’ longs to reunite in sexual intercourse and marriage, a reunion that not only provides companionship but restores ‘*adam*’ to his original wholeness. The woman is not just “like himself” but “from himself” and thereby a complementary fit to himself.

DeYoung: If God wanted to establish a world in which the normative marital and sexual relationship is that between persons of the opposite sex, Genesis 1-2 fits perfectly. The narrative strongly suggests what the church has almost uniformly taught: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman.” It’s hard not to conclude from a straightforward reading of Genesis 1-2 that the divine design for sexual intimacy is not any combination of persons, or even any type of two persons coming together, but one man becoming one flesh with one woman. ...

Brownson: The Genesis text portrays marriage as a solution, not for “incompleteness,” but for aloneness (Gen 2:18). ... The narrator declares, “But for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.”... This line of interpretation is confirmed by the response of the man when he meets the woman (2:23): “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” On the surface of it, this appears to be a discovery of sameness, not difference. Furthermore, if one looks elsewhere in Scripture for similar language, one discovers that this language is always used to express kinship

(Gen. 29:14; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:12-13; 1 Chron. 11:1)... In the other texts where this language occurs, there is not a hint of any notion of complementarity... Despite the fact that such gender complementarity, allegedly taught in the creation narratives, is the most commonly cited reason why commentators believe Scripture teaches that same-sex erotic relations are wrong, the texts themselves do not support this claim

Vines: Becoming “one flesh” encompasses much more than the act of sex. It includes the entire covenantal context in which God intends for sex to take place. ... What seems ... to be most important in marriage is not whether the partners are anatomically different from one another. It’s whether the inherently different people involved are willing to keep covenant with each other in a relationship of mutual self-giving.

3. Please share your thoughts about whether Genesis 1 & 2 teaches clearly that “marriage is to be between one man and one woman” or whether the passage is not stressing this type of gender complementarity but every person’s need for kinship, affirmation, intimacy, and a relationship of mutual self-giving. _____

Introduction: Here we have excerpts from quotations in Section 6 related to the most quoted text condemning homosexual practice (Romans 1:18-32). The first three are comments from affirming theologians followed by three quotations by three traditionalists (see pg. 70-73).

Wilson: Is the text a sweeping condemnation of all same-sex practice or does it speak to the predominant practices of the time, especially temple prostitution, ... pederasty, and the sexual services required of slaves? ... [I]t’s much more likely that Paul’s argument ... is offered in a shared context dominated by same-sex acts characteristic of pederasty, temple prostitution, and slave sex, which were grossly perverse, demeaning, and exploitative.

Gushee: Still, stepping back, it is appropriate to wonder whether what Paul is so harshly condemning in Romans 1 has much if anything to do with that devout, loving lesbian couple who have been together 20 years and sit on the third row at church. Their lives do not at all look like the overall picture of depravity offered in Romans 1:18-32. You certainly wonder about this when you know that couple—or when you are that couple.

Vines: The key point to note ... is that none of those reasons extends to the loving, committed relationships of gay Christians today. The main argument for why Romans 1 should extend to gay Christians—anatomical complementarity—is not supported by the text itself. ... From the church’s early centuries through the nineteenth century, commentators consistently identified the moral problem in Romans 1:26-27 as “unbridled passions,” not the expression of a same-sex orientation. Furthermore, no biblical interpreter prior to the twentieth century even hinted that Paul’s statements were intended to consign a whole group of people to lifelong celibacy.

Gagnon: Instead of acknowledging that God had made them “male and female” and had called on them to copulate and procreate, they denied the transparent complementarity of their sexuality and engaged in sex with the same sex, indulging themselves in irresponsible passion on which stable and productive family structures could not be built. As with Jesus, so with Paul: the creation story in Genesis does not leave room for a legitimate expression of same-sex intercourse.

Kirk: In such a narrative of God’s creation-restoring work through Christ, homosexuality sits as one element to the larger canvas of the disordered world that needs to be set to rights. The picture of Genesis 2 is not restored merely when people preserve their sexual activity for the one person they will be faithful to for life; it is restored when a man leaves his house to be joined to a woman as his wife.

DeYoung: Even if Paul did not use our modern vocabulary, his judgment is still the same. Homosexual behavior is a sin, not according to who practices it or by what motivation they seek it, but because that act itself, as a truth-suppressing exchange, is contrary to God’s good design.. . . The problem with the consuming passion in verse 27 was not its intensity but that it corresponded to the giving up of man’s natural sexual complementarity with women and committing shameless acts with other men.

4. Please share whether the first three quotations are the first time you have read or heard of an interpretation of Romans 1:18-32 that opens up the possibility that Paul is not condemning Christian same-sex intimacy that is based in mutual love and a covenantal bond of kinship; but that Paul was referring to the only practices that were familiar to him and all Jews in that time and place: abusive, exploitative, dominating, lustful, unnatural, idolatrous, hedonistic same-sex dalliances that were often done in Roman temples and with children as victims. What are your thoughts about this alternate, affirming interpretation of Romans 1 that considers the specific cultural and historical context? _____

5. These six quotes raise a complex issue of interpretation of Scripture that considers the cultural time and place of Paul’s pronouncements (see Hermeneutic Guideline 5, pg. 44). Share your thoughts about the tension between the traditional position in the latter three quotes and the affirming position in the first three quotes. _____

Discussion Questions for Section 7
Historical, Biblical, and Theological Foundations for Marriage

1. What does the evidence from secular and Biblical history tell us about the contention that marriage has always been between “one man and one woman” who mutually consent to the marriage and are equal partners within the marriage? _____

2. Reformed Christian professor of social psychology, Dr. David Myers, has summarized six significant reinterpretations of Scripture regarding marriage (see pg. 88). How have the church’s views changed on a variety of marriage issues? _____

3. How has the CRCs position on divorce (1980) and the rights of women (2008) in marriage and the church changed after holding to a traditional position? _____

4. On page 94 of the report Wendy VanderWal-Gritter contrasts the traditional “Creation Order Priority” view of Genesis 1-2 and subsequent passages dealing with gay and lesbian same-sex behavior versus the “Kinship Priority” view of these passages. What view makes sense to you? Why? _____

5. “Be fruitful and multiply” is a purpose of marriage we have heard many times. Amy Plantinga Pauw and James Brownson provide ideas regarding the meaning of “fruitfulness” in marriage that is much broader than procreating. What new concepts do they propose (see pg. 95-96)? _____

6. The traditional interpretation of Scripture requires the church to impose celibacy on all same-sex attracted Christians. This interpretation requires every LGBT individual to forego seeking to satisfy the universal human needs for affection, affirmation, intimacy, and touch. Is there room for the Bible to be interpreted in ways that allow gay Christians to be cherished in a committed relationship just as heterosexuals are? If yes, how? If no, why not? (See Sections 5 & 6 of this report on Biblical Interpretation.) _____

7. In the last paragraph at the end of Section 7 (pg. 97) is a series of questions that ends with these two: “Is the church ready to revise its understanding of Scripture as it has done historically with slavery, anti-Semitism, segregation, interracial marriage, divorce and adultery, and women’s equality? Can fellow Christians disagree on the issue of same-sex marriage and still live in unity under the banner of devotion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?” How do you respond to these questions? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 8
Social and Psychological Goods Typically Enabled by Marriage

1. How does the Bible’s theme of God’s justice and compassion find congruence with the denial of the numerous legal benefits of marriage to monogamous, same-sex Christian couples who want to marry (p. 103)? _____

2. Beyond the legal benefits are numerous relational and health benefits of a good marriage. Can you name some of these (see pg. 100-102)? How is it consistent with God’s character, as we read of it through Scripture (e.g., I John 4; Romans 8:39), that our God would say to one group of his image bearers who love and seek to serve him, “You must live alone. It is sin for you to marry a loving partner?” _____

3. When you look over the list summarizing some of the legal benefits of marriage at the end of Section 8, which of them surprise you because you just took them for granted? How might our Reformed theology allow for LGBT persons who desire to marry to be blessed with these benefits just as those who are heterosexual and marry? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 9

Psychological Issues Involved in Considering Full Inclusion versus Non-inclusion

1. Can the Holy Spirit use our compassion to stimulate a renewed understanding of God’s will? Is it always true that our emotions manipulate our reason, leading us to reach incorrect intellectual positions? Is it ever true that reason alone operates without emotions when examining the meaning of Scripture? _____

2. Is it possible or even advisable for one to try to avoid emotion when approaching the interpretation of Scripture? Have Spirit-guided emotions ever informed your intellectual interpretation?

3. Some beliefs we have held give shape to how we approach and interpret Scripture. What are some ways we can be more sure that we have not shaped Scripture to fit some prior belief? _____

4. Science has shown that gender occurs along a spectrum and is not a simple binary of male or female in the animal world as well as in humans. What impact might this have on the conclusion that “same-sex orientation is a result of sin and brokenness in the world after the Fall”? Is it possible to conclude that same-sex orientation is merely part of God’s wonderful plan for diversity?

5. What clinical evidence exists (beyond rare claims from some that “I have changed”) that same-sex orientation can be reliably changed to heterosexual orientation through psychological therapy or religious counseling? If no research evidence exists, what ramifications might this fact have on our consideration of the human needs and desires of LGBT Christians? _____

6. Heterosexual orientation leads naturally to heterosexual behavior, which is not limited solely or even primarily to sexual intercourse. In like manner, homosexual orientation leads naturally to homosexual behavior – which also is not limited solely or even primarily to sexual intercourse. These aspects of a person naturally coexist as an integrated whole and seek expression together. What impact might these facts have on a position that holds that is acceptable to God to have a same-sex orientation but it is sinful to act on those desires? _____

7. Consider the psychological effects noted in the report (see pg. 113) of denying marriage and the intimacy that is only possible in this cherishing relationship while the church imposes celibacy on gay Christians? Are these consistent with the express desire of God that his people live lives of joy and gratitude? _____

8. Bad trees bear bad fruit. Name some tragic consequences of the church holding to the traditional interpretation of Scripture that results in the condemnation of same-sex marriage (see pg. 114-117)? What must change for the CRC to become a “good tree” for the LGBT Christians among us?

9. Should our church repent of its part in causing suffering for its LGBT worshippers? If no, why not? If yes, why, and what would that repentance look like? _____

10. Which position do you believe creates more harm or benefit to the spiritual health of a gay person: the church forbidding marriage as a way to obey Scripture or the church encouraging marriage as a way to obey Scripture? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 10
Personal Stories of LGBT Christians

1. Describe your emotional responses to the stories in this section of the report. What was there about one or more of the stories that prompted these responses? _____

2. Which personal story touched you the most? What about that story was compelling? What did you find engaging, disturbing, or challenging? How might you respond to the writer of that story if you had the opportunity to talk? _____

3. Personal story 11 tells of a pastor's experience working with parents of LGBT children. What about those pastoral experiences did you find most encouraging—or most troubling? _____

4. How are the experiences of parents coming to terms with the sexual orientation or gender identity of their LGBT children similar to or different from the church coming to terms with its LGBT members? _____

5. Much of the Bible is narrative. It is the story of God at work in the lives of his people—individually and corporately—and their responses to God. Our theology is derived from these stories as we come to understand our experience of God. How do our experiences of God in the life of the church influence our understanding of Scripture and our theology today? _____

6. John 16:13 says, “the Spirit of truth...will guide you into all the truth” (NIV). How might the Spirit of God be using the experience of LGBT individuals and their families to guide the church more deeply into the truth? _____

7. If you know anyone who identifies as LGBT, have you ever asked them to share their story with you? If so, what was your response? If you have not asked an LGBT person to share their story, how might you go about getting to know them better and asking them to tell you their story? _____

Discussion Questions for Section 11
Additional Pastoral Advice on Maintaining Unity

1. It is difficult to be a church that is “continually reforming” its theological positions and moral practices through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to insure they are consistent with God's revelation in all of Scripture as well as in nature and human culture. What are some reasons why this is a difficult process? _____

2. Why is it important to be “continually reforming” as Christians? To what and whom should we listen for guidance as we make this effort? _____

3. What do you hope for in continuing the dialogue in the church on the topic of same-sex marriage?

4. How does Scripture allow room for support of same-sex marriage (See Sections 5 & 6 of this report on Biblical Interpretation)? _____

5. In what ways might it honor Scripture to allow both beliefs to exist in the denomination? _____

6. What might the church look like if it made welcoming space for both those who support same-sex marriage and those who do not? How would this be similar to or different from the way the church

makes space for congregations to decide whether or not they will ordain women to be office bearers in the church? _____
